



Nevada Strategic Planning for Statewide Interoperability

Focus Group 1

Lake Tahoe, NV

June 7, 2005

Follow Up Report



Executive Summary

The Lake Tahoe focus group session on June 7, 2005 provided valuable input from the state and local practitioner perspective for the development of the Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan. The focus group participants identified the following top three major initiatives to be considered during the upcoming strategic planning session in Las Vegas on September 14, 2005:

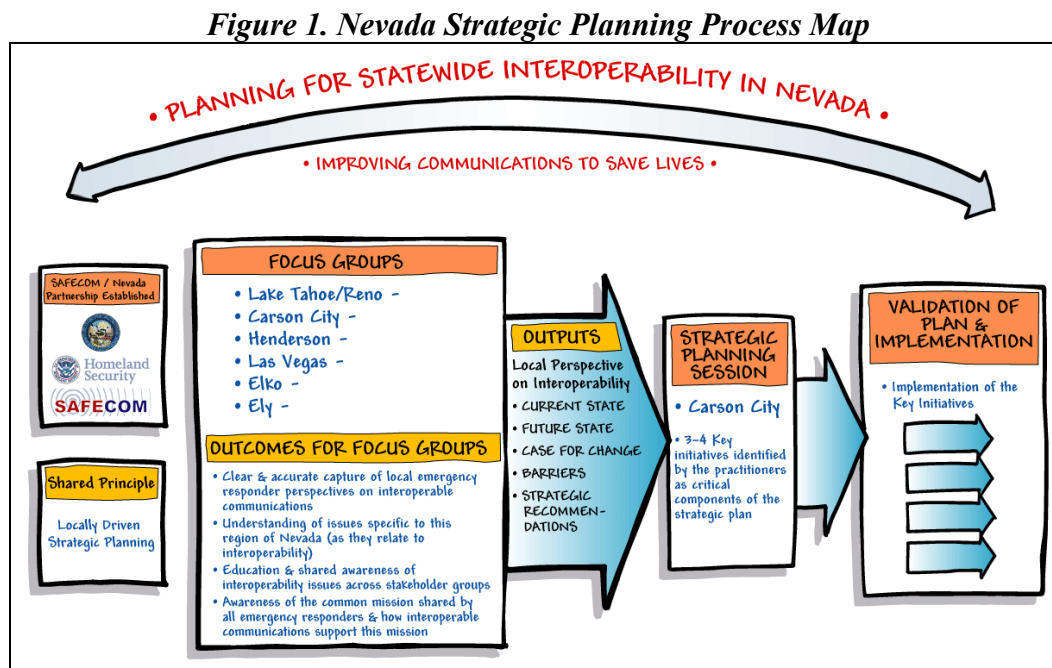
- (1) Establish a single point of access responsible for managing and accounting for all efforts relating to communications interoperability
- (2) Establish a clear goal that defines the necessary level of interoperability addressing operational as well as technical protocols
- (3) Identify who needs to talk to whom and map to current capabilities through conversations and discussions with users across all systems (800, VHF, UHF, etc.)

Introduction

The State of Nevada has established a partnership with the SAFECOM Program to conduct a pilot project that will lead to the development of a communications interoperability strategic plan that includes the input of public safety practitioners. SAFECOM's mission is to serve as the umbrella program within the federal government to help local, state, tribal and federal public safety agencies improve public safety response through more effective and efficient interoperable wireless communications. The involvement of local and statewide emergency responders is essential to the success of developing a Statewide Interoperability Strategic Plan. The Nevada Communications Steering Committee (NCSC) serves as the primary point of contact for these efforts.*

In order to develop a collaborative Statewide Communications Interoperability Strategic Plan, the State has asked SAFECOM to conduct six (6) regional focus group sessions, comprised mainly of informal and formal leaders from fire, law enforcement, and Emergency Medical Services (EMS) departments. Additional representation includes public health, local and state agencies in order to accurately capture local perspectives on the state of interoperable communications in Nevada. In addition to the 6 focus group sessions, a strategic planning session will also be conducted to validate and build on the inputs from the focus groups.

The following graphic depicts the process by which SAFECOM will bring locally driven philosophy and strategic planning approach to the regional focus groups and strategic planning session.



* The members of the Nevada Communications Steering Committee (NCSC) who participated in this focus group did so in their practitioner or individual agency role. They did not participate as members of the NCSC. No NCSC deliberations were undertaken, nor decisions made.

The outcomes of the focus group sessions are as follows:

- ❑ Clear and accurate capture of local emergency responder perspectives on interoperable communications
- ❑ Understanding of issues specific to this region of Nevada (as they relate to interoperability)
- ❑ Education and shared awareness of interoperability issues across stakeholder groups
- ❑ Awareness of the common mission shared by all emergency responders, saving lives, and how interoperable communications support this mission



Each focus group session is designed as a series of conversations centered on the following issues: interoperability (statewide and regional) as it relates to the current state, the envisioned future state, case for why change needs to happen, barriers to achieving the future state, and recommended strategies to pursue.

Detailed Overview

Current State

The objective of the Current State conversation is to affirm the facts about current interoperability capabilities and needs in Nevada regarding response efforts spanning day-to-day operations up through catastrophic events.

The Lake Tahoe focus group identified the following Current State themes specific to communications interoperability in Nevada:

- Participants recognized that there is not one technological solution that currently meets all of the needs of the region
- Washoe County has a working interoperability model that includes monthly meetings with all users
- Seven different jurisdictions are impacted by interoperability in the Washoe/Tahoe Basin region
- The Washoe County and Tahoe Basin Region regional perspectives on this issue in this focus group face unique problems
- Both, the Washoe County and Tahoe Basin, regions lack interoperability plans and lack knowledge about the existence of state and/or regional plans
- Different disciplines use different languages making communications difficult
- Participants are not convinced that the region has the appropriate capabilities, that these capabilities are maintained, and that these capabilities are available on demand in the case of an emergency situation
- Jurisdictional turf battles and bureaucracy slow down progress toward interoperability

- This causes both political and financial problems

Future State

The objective of the Future State conversation is to describe the desired future regarding communications among emergency responders in Nevada.

The Lake Tahoe focus group highlighted the following elements of the Future State of communications interoperability in Nevada:

- A common communications platform exists that consists of technical compatibility where frequency, band, technology is irrelevant. This platform is secure and encrypted appropriately in order to protect the system from terrorists and threats
- Emergency responders rely on one device that fits the needs of end users and is simple for the end user to operate
- Communications teams with technical capabilities can be deployed on demand within a short timeframe to arrive and assist in emergency situations and have access to real-time data imagery
- Appropriate policies and procedures exist to support the use of all technology in place
- Governance reflects the needs across all stakeholders groups, includes diversity of all users, and does not exclude any group from being interoperable
- A single point of contact in the state supports and is responsible for coordination of interoperability efforts
- Awareness and reconciliation of the public's expectation for public safety services and the public safety agency's ability to respond
- Exercises and training are regularly scheduled to address regional scenarios and include multiple participants at all levels
- Communications systems are practitioner-driven, not vendor-driven

Case for Change

The objective of the Case for Change conversation is to discuss the consequences and implications if changes to Nevada's state of interoperable communications do not occur in addition to the opportunities that may be missed by not changing. The Case for Change statements should appeal to the emotions of individuals and result in action.

The Lake Tahoe focus group identified the following elements as part of making a Case for Change:

- Centralized interoperability systems will provide Nevada with the opportunity to stay compatible and increase efficiency with shared responsibility for support and maintenance costs
- The interoperable system can be used by all who need it on demand if all appropriate parties share in the development and maintenance of the system.
- Current funding streams are a good start, but Nevada needs to expand interoperability to many more communities and therefore, requires additional resources
- Addressing turf battles to function as allies would help speed up response times

- Improving interoperability will help avoid needless loss of life and property and help avoid liability lawsuits for not being up to industry standards or meeting the community's expectations
- Creating additional capabilities will benefit the public at large
- The community will benefit from improved efficiency and resource sharing that can be achieved through communications interoperability

Barriers

The purpose of the Barriers conversation is to identify factors hindering the effort to achieve the Future State.

The Lake Tahoe participants identified the following barriers:

- Insufficient funding for infrastructure
- Geographical locations
 - Mountain ranges, rural, urban
- Lack of knowledge and awareness on issues – administrators and elected officials
- Sustainability of equipment
- Obsolescence of equipment
- Bureaucracy and jurisdictional issues/turf battles
- Lack of statewide strategic plan
- Population and funding difference between north and south/urban and rural
- Disparate technologies across the state and agencies

Strategic Recommendations

The purpose of the Strategic Recommendations conversation is to identify the fundamental strategic initiatives essential to reach the desired future state, including the



completion of the statewide plan and identification of the most important initiatives the state can undertake in the short term.

The Lake Tahoe focus group participants identified the following top three (3) critical initiatives to achieve communications interoperability statewide:

1. Establish a single point of access for who will be responsible for managing and accounting for all efforts relating to communications interoperability
2. Establish a clear goal that defines the needed level of interoperability addressing operational as well as technical protocols
3. Identify who needs to talk to whom and map to current capabilities through conversations and discussions with users across all systems (800, VHF, etc)

Next Steps

The outcomes from the six (6) regional focus group sessions will drive the upcoming strategic planning session. The key initiatives identified by practitioners across the state will serve as the documented view of the user community detailing their perspective on efforts that will most improve interoperable communications in the State of Nevada. The strategic planning session is scheduled to take place in Las Vegas, Nevada on September 14, 2005.

The SAFECOM/Nevada Partnership is committed to maintaining communications with the participants of each focus group as the planning for statewide interoperability in Nevada progresses. This report details the results of the Lake Tahoe focus group meeting and was distributed to the participants on Wednesday, June 15, 2005 (a list of focus group participants is included as Appendix A). In addition, the results of the conversations with all six (6) focus groups will be made available to all participants in late July.

Immediate actions participants committed to based on their participation in the focus group include:

- Establish a user group to share with El Dorado County to build up the existing radio users group database available to any interested participants
- Share El Dorado network for Washoe County
- Provide SAFECOM with more contacts for potential future focus group participants

Appendix A

Participants in the June 7, 2005 focus group meeting, in Nevada's Lake Tahoe Area on Nevada's Strategic Planning for Statewide Communications Interoperability:

First Name	Last Name	Division/Department	Phone	Email
Rick	Bareuther	City of Sparks	775-353-2315	rbareuther@ci.sparks.nv.us
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Mark	Blomstrom	Department of Information Technology/NCSC Staff	775-684-5807	mblomstrom@doit.nv.gov
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Doug	Johnson	Douglas County Commissioner	775-790-3195	
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James	Linardos	North Lake Tahoe Fire Chief		
Tom	Miller	Sparks Police Department	775-353-2309	tmiller@cityofsparks.us
Glade	Myler	Deputy Attorney General	775-694-5197	gamyler@ag.state.nv.us
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Susan	Parker	City of Reno E-911 Dispatch Center	775-334-2370	parkers@ci.reno.nv.us
Mike	Pennacchio	Incline Village Risk Manager and Emergency Manager	775-832-1266	Mike_pennacchio@ivgid.org
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Appendix B

Graphical Representation of the Nevada Strategic Planning Process

